

The Gurnet-Part VI

By HERBERT BOARDMAN

Mrs. Boardman was awakened one night by the disturbing sound of ponderous pacing back and forth on the veranda. She repeatedly called "Who's there?" but no answer. She was beginning to feel rather alarmed when Andy Richmond came along and told her it was only Henry the Eighth walking. Henry VIII was the name of the Boardman bull.

It was in the summer of 1896 that Henry Finney, a young surfman, fell in love with Emma Boardman. The romance flourished and they were married in Boston, June 8, 1897.

One day, little Adele Howe, my constant playmate threw her arms around my neck and kissed me. I was very much embarrassed by this unseemly display of emotion and indignantly said, "Don't be so poolish, Adele." So you see I was a confirmed bachelor even in my infancy.

1897. The newly married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Finney, ran the Gurnet House the season of 1897, assisted by an excellent maid, Marie George.

1898. I scrawled my name in the register for the first time on Aug. 26, 1898. This was the year of the Spanish-American War and my uncle, Fayette Boardman, served in the U.S. Army. Mr. and Mrs. Brown helped my grandfather that year.

It was sometime previous to this that poor Tom Hennigan met his sad fate. One night after drinking too much, he lost the way driving to his little cabin, the Hotel de Pines, located in High Pines about 2 miles up the beach, back of the Wright cottage. The next morning he was found standing waist deep in an icy boghole, smiling, but frozen to death. It was necessary to shoot his horse.

This year the Boardmans remained at the Gurnet until Thanksgiving and by doing so went through a terrifying experience. The worst storm New England had known in centuries raged up and down the coast Nov. 26-27, 1898. This storm is always referred to as the "Portland Storm" (because of the unexplained loss of the steamer Portland) or the "November Gale."

The roaring of the wind was so great it was impossible to carry on conversation with a person across the room. Mr. Boardman, venturing out to the barn to see if the cattle were safe, was obliged to crawl on hands and knees to keep from being blown away. The waves, mountain high, dashed wildly

against the bluff on the ocean side, while the waters of Plymouth Bay flooded the whole lower portion of the point, with waves breaking against the stone wall and throwing water and spray on the very lawn of the Boardman house.

The chimney on the west side of the house blew down and it was necessary to grab the parlor stove -- fire and all -- and run with it across the hall to another room and attach it to another chimney. In the middle of the afternoon, at the height of the storm there was one blinding flash of light. There was no thunder following and all were startled by this strange phenomenon. Afterward they wondered if it was in any way connected with the sinking of the "Portland." This ill-fated ship put out from Boston at the beginning of the gale. She was loaded with a happy throng going home for Thanksgiving. The boat was never heard from again. Bodies and debris from the ship were later recovered along the shore.

The second night, the terrific gale abated quite suddenly and on the next day, strangely enough, the water was like a mill-pond. The Boardmans, on looking out on the morning of Nov. 28, saw the havoc the storm had wrought. The old life-saving station on Saquish Beach, the little bath house by the schoolhouse, one of the farm out-buildings and the

cottages on Plymouth Beach, all had disappeared! The duck pond was flooded and has been ever since an unsavory, salt, stagnant pool, the breeding place of mosquitoes and the abode of muskrats.

Many dunes near the bridge were flattened and destroyed and the sea had broken through in many places. Further up the coast, the North River had changed its mouth, throwing Humarock Beach in Scituate into Marshfield, territorially speaking.

The Gurnet must have seen other terrific storms, especially the one in which old Minot's Light was swept away in April 1851. Even the occasional north or southeasters during the summer months are pretty wild and kick up an angry sea with a gorgeous surf. But the "Portland Storm of 1898" is still regarded as surpassing all others. The Boardmans never forgot it.

It was about this time that the telephone line from Duxbury was constructed.

1900. Many changes were coming about and the season was a busy one. Gasoline and naphtha launches were supplanting the more picturesque sail boats. Capt. Holmes, characterized in Ellen Boardman's poem as "the tried and true," resigned about this time, leaving his post to his number one surferman, Augustus Rogers. There were many new faces at the station house. Andy Richmond was dead, Ben Manner had taken charge of the Brant Rock Station, Joe Thurston was lobstering at Saquish and Clark's Island and Henry Finney had become a Boston businessman.

Capt. Rogers, a fine man beloved by all, had a fine crew including such men as Mr. Tobin, Mr. Rohde, Mr. Kezar, Mr. King and Mr. Stanley. It was not an easy task to fill the post of the peerless Capt. Holmes (whom I delighted in calling ex-Capt. Homes) but Capt. Rogers acquitted himself to the satisfaction of all. Nearly all his children were born on the Gurnet. Rodman and Olcott Rogers, the 2 oldest sons, were fine boys. Capt. Rogers remained about 10 years and was then transferred to Manomet.

The Gurnet House was full nearly all summer. The Holton family of Cambridge, with many children, occupied the big double room in the newer part of the house most of the season, Mr. and Mrs. Hilton and son Frank of Boston were new guests; also Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Fitz and baby daughter Mildred of Somerville. Miss Martha Jenson of Boston, fiancée of William Upham came for the first time.

The beach wagon, with its 3 rows of seats and the name "Gurnet" painted on the side, made regular trips to and from Duxbury. The old horses "Sam" and "Gypsy" pulled the heavily laden wagon up and the down the beach every day. Mr. Boardman would

often get off and walk to lighten the load. He was so energetic and walked so fast, and the horses plodded so deliberately, that he would often get far ahead and impatiently trot back to meet the wagon again. It distressed him to handle baggage and he could never see why people brought trunks that had to be lifted on and off the wagon. He claimed he could travel Europe with only a box of collars.

Once when a woman discovered there was no doctor on the point she vowed she couldn't stay a single night. "Then you had better go right back to Boston. We come down here to be well, not to be sick," indignantly retorted Mr. Boardman.

One Sunday afternoon, a Mr. Perkins held religious services in the pavilion and Mrs. Page, another guest, pestered him with unanswerable questions about the hereafter. Mrs. Page also wanted to know if the clams couldn't be chloroformed before being steamed. It was so cruel to treat them so. She was a deep feeling woman and sincere in these matters.

Religious services are unusual at the Gurnet; the old saying is "You leave Sunday behind when you leave Duxbury Bridge."

David McGaw of Atlanta, Ga. was a guest after an absence of 15 years. He ventured to put his arm

around a maiden lady, Miss Marion Vose Benney, on the beach one day, on a dare. The lady did not object in the least, apparently. She delighted in sitting on the beach and looking for mermaids.

The most noted guest of 1900 was Mark Price, the actor. He was an austere, majestic appearing man with a personality not unlike that of Daniel Webster. We did not know Mark Price was an actor until he was found studying Shakespeare on the beach. One afternoon, some of us children were playing theatre in the barn. Mr. Price asked us what we were doing. We told him we were making believe we were in a theatre having a show. He exclaimed, "Oh, children, don't play that! Play any other game you want to, but don't play that!"

A simple fellow named Taft from Waltham sat side of Mr. Price at the dinner table and when he would ask in drawling tones, "Please pass the cake," Mark Price would comply and reply in a stentorian tone, "Certainly, my friend, you have already had 5 pieces. Nature abhors a vacuum!"

There were 2 and sometimes 3 tables in the dining room when the house was full.

On the night of Aug. 20, 1900 a yachting party from Brant Rock was becalmed off the point and came ashore seeking supper and a night's lodging. There were 15 hungry individuals, all clamoring for food after Mr. and Mrs. Boardman had finished their hard day's work. It was a wildly hilarious crowd and kept the house alive all night with its merriment. The captain was Dana Blackman of the well-known Brant Rock family. A minister, George Solley, and S. Freeman of the family who founded the big Peacehaven Hotel, then only in its first stage as a hostelry, were also in the crowd. Brant Rock and Green Harbor crowds are apt to be quite hilarious.

(Written in 1935)

